

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

Joshua Friedman, individually and on behalf of
all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

C.A. No:

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

-v.-

Law Offices of Steven Cohen, LLC,
Accelerated Inventory Management, LLC
and John Does 1-25,

Defendant(s).

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Joshua Friedman (hereinafter "Plaintiff") brings this Class Action Complaint by and through his attorneys, Stein Saks PLLC, against Defendant Law Offices of Steven Cohen, LLC (hereinafter "Defendant Law Offices") and Defendant Accelerated Inventory Management, LLC (hereinafter "Defendant Accelerated") individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

1. Congress enacted the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("FDCPA" or the "Act") in 1977 in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. §1692(a). At that time, Congress was

concerned that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy." *Id.* Congress concluded that "existing laws...[we]re inadequate to protect consumers," and that "'the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. Congress explained that the purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to "insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged." *Id.* § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer protection laws were inadequate. *Id.* § 1692(b), Congress gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court has pendent jurisdiction over any state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) as this is where a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of New York consumers under § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of New York, County of Kings, and resides at 1551 54th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

8. Defendant Law Offices is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and as used in the FDCPA with an address at 540 East 180th Street, Suite 203, Bronx, New York 10457.

9. Upon information and belief, Defendant Law Offices is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.

10. Defendant Accelerated is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and as used in the FDCPA and can be served process upon their registered agent, URS Agents Inc. at One Commerce Plaza, 99 Washington Ave, Suite 805A, Albany, New York 12210.

11. Upon information and belief, Defendant Accelerated is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.

12. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

13. Plaintiffs bring this claim on behalf of the following case, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).

14. The Class consists of:

- a. all individuals with addresses in the State of New York;
- b. to whom Defendant Law Offices sent an initial collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- c. on behalf of Defendant Accelerated;
- d. that falsely stated that interest may be accruing on the debt when it was not currently accruing;
- e. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

15. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendant and those companies and entities on whose behalf it attempts to collect debts and/or has purchased debts.

16. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendant and all officers, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendant and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.

17. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibits A, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692g.

18. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in

handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor his attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

19. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- a. **Numerosity:** The Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- b. **Common Questions Predominate:** Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominance over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibit A violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, 1692g.
- c. **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the members of the Plaintiff Class. The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Class have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- d. **Adequacy:** The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are adverse to the absent members of the Plaintiff Class. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor his

counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.

e. **Superiority:** A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

20. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Class predominate over any questions affecting an individual member and in that a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.

21. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

22. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs numbered above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

23. Some time prior to November 19, 2020, an obligation was allegedly incurred to WebBank.

24. The WebBank obligation arose out of transactions which were primarily for personal, family or household purposes.

25. The alleged WebBank obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(5).

26. WebBank is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(4).

27. WebBank purportedly sold the alleged debt to Defendant Accelerated, a debt collector, who contracted with the Defendant Law Offices to collect the alleged debt.

28. Defendant collects and attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of creditors using the United States Postal Services, telephone and internet.

Violation – November 19, 2020 Collection Letter

29. On or about November 19, 2020, Defendant Law Offices sent the Plaintiff a collection letter (the "Letter") regarding the alleged debt owed to WebBank. A true and correct copy of the Letter is attached hereto as Exhibit A.

30. When a debt collector solicits payment from a consumer, it must, within five days of an initial communication send the consumer a written notice containing:

(1) the amount of the debt;

(2) the name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;

(3) a statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt collector;

(4) a statement that if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of the judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and

(5) a statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor. 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(a).

31. The required disclosures set forth in 15 U.S.C. §1692g(a) are more commonly known as the "G Notice".

32. The FDCPA further provides that "if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the thirty day period . . . that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed . . . the debt collector shall cease collection . . . until the debt collector obtains verification of the debt . . . and a copy of such verification is mailed to the consumer by the debt collector." 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(b).

33. Although a collection letter may track the statutory language, "the collector nevertheless violates the Act if it conveys that information in a confusing or contradictory fashion so as to cloud the required message with uncertainty." Russell v. EQUIFAX A.R.S., 74 F.3d 30, 35 (2d Cir. 1996) ("It is not enough for a debt collection agency to simply include the proper debt validation notice in a mailing to a consumer-- Congress intended that such notice be clearly conveyed."). Put differently, a notice containing "language that 'overshadows or contradicts' other language informing a consumer of her rights . . . violates the Act." Russell, 74 F.3d at 34.

34. The Letter provides a breakdown of the balance as follows:

Charged Off Principal:	\$34007.26
Charged Off Interest:	\$1337.61
Charged Off Fees:	\$41.95
Post Charge Off Interest:	\$0.00
Balance Due:	\$35386.82

35. The letter further states: "As of the date of this letter, you owe the amount set forth above. The amount set forth above may be increased from day to day due to statutory interest and fees. If we do not accept the amount you send as payment in full satisfaction of debt, we will contact you before depositing your payment. For further information, please contact the undersigned or call 1-212-564-1900."

36. The letter states that "Post Charge Off Interest" is \$0.00.

37. The letter states that the amount set forth may increase from day to day due to statutory interest and fees.

38. Defendant is aware that during the collection of this debt, the balance will not vary at all and stating that it may increase is merely a deceptive collection tactic intended to intimidate and coerce the consumer into paying immediately.

39. The threat of a balance increase overshadows the "g-notice" language and coerces the consumer not to exert his rights under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

40. In addition, the statement that statutory interest may be increasing daily is directly contradicted by the breakdown listed earlier in the letter that explicitly says that "Post Charge Off Interest" is \$0.00.

41. Moreover, the statement is deceptive because statutory interest only accrues on a balance due to a judgment interest as opposed to Plaintiff's debt which is not due to a judgment.

42. Stating that the account balance may increase due to statutory interest and fees when they are not increasing is materially misleading to Plaintiff and is a false statement that Defendant knowingly made.

43. Defendant's false statement overshadowed Plaintiff's §1692g right to dispute or validate the debt as he believed he must pay immediately to avoid accruing interest and fees ("adjustments").

44. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

COUNT I
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e
et seq.

45. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

46. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

47. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

48. Defendant violated § 1692e:

- a. As the Letter it is open to more than one reasonable interpretation, at least one of which is inaccurate.
- b. By making a false and misleading representation in violation of §1692e(10).

49. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, and Plaintiff is entitled to an award of actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C.
§1692g et seq.

50. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

51. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g.

52. Pursuant to 15 USC §1692g, a debt collector:

Within five days after the initial communication with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt, a debt collector shall, unless the following information is contained in the initial communication or the consumer has paid the debt, send the consumer a written notice containing –

1. The amount of the debt;
2. The name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;
3. A statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt-collector;
4. A statement that the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of a judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and
5. A statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor.

53. The Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §1692g, threatening of a balance increase, which overshadows the "g-notice" language and coerces the consumer not to exert its rights under the FDCPA.

54. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

55. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Joshua Friedman, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, demands judgment from Defendant Law Offices of Steven Cohen, LLC and Accelerated Inventory Management, LLC as follows:

1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Raphael Deutsch, Esq. as Class Counsel;
2. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
3. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
4. Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
5. Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and

6. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Respectfully Submitted,

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